

January 21, 2013

Mr. Randel Perry
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle District
c/o GPT/BNSF Custer Spur EIS Co-Lead Agencies
1100 112th Avenue Northeast, Suite 400
Bellevue, WA 98004

Dear Mr. Perry:

This letter is testimony regarding the scoping hearing for the Cherry Point Port expansion.

The people of Billings are terribly confused about what impacts to expect from the West Coast coal exports. An insufficient amount of investigative journalism is taking place. More likely, the press is spoon-fed information through press releases and such by the coal and railroad industry. For instance, on December 13, 2012 a respected local television station, KTVQ, reported that we could expect to see 48-54 million tons of coal exported from the Powder River Basin to Cherry Point annually, and that, as a consequence, we would see an additional 8-10 trains each day running through Billings. But according to the Terry Whiteside study, 50 million tons of coal would result in about 19 additional trains each day running through Billings (loaded and empty). The railroad industry's figure of 8-10 trains/day does not include loaded and empty trains, only loaded at best. The actual number of trains per day running through Billings should be corrected to 16-20 trains. Yet the television station was unwilling to correct its story.

We in Billings, Montana need to be part of an Environmental Impact Study in order to make informed decisions about how to evaluate and mitigate what promises to be the most rapid and largest increase in rail traffic in the history of this region. All the trains that go to Cherry Point will be passing through Seattle and Spokane. Spokane and Billings are pinch points for the railroad and can expect nearly identical numbers of trains passing through them and share many of the same design flaws of the railroad and city relationship, e.g. bisecting the city and blocking several crossings.

How can we really mitigate impacts? If it turns out that a bypass of Billings is the only mitigating measure reasonable, then we may well waste much money, local, state, and federal, trying to stave off the effects piecemeal.

What can we do to make sure that the railroads and coal companies do not require taxpayers and citizens to bear the external cost of shipping coal this way? If we are going to pay for mitigation measures as taxpayers and citizens, we need to face that fact early on.

We will experience more noise. We will experience more cracking of infrastructure, such as foundations and walls of the buildings nearby.

No one knows exactly what the extent is of coal dust. No scientific studies have been carried out. Nor do we know what the health and other impacts are of the coal dust, including the possible impacts to the blue ribbon trout stream, Yellowstone River, which these trains will pass along for 80 miles.

No one knows what the impacts will be to health, but pulmonary physicians have claimed that with more trains they will be seeing more patients in their offices with diesel fumes related asthma problems.

There will be congestion. The crossing bars will be down as much as 12 hours a day if all of the West Coast ports are developed. This will create frustration on the part of automobile drivers. Many will be late for work. The citizens will be stuck idling while they could be being productive. Some will miss airplanes – the airport is most directly reached by the 27th St. downtown railroad crossing.

Women in labor may be caught by railroad traffic trying to reach hospitals from either I 90 or the south side of Billings. Police, fire trucks, ambulances and other emergency services will be blocked from the most direct route between the south and north sides of Billings. The police station, fire station, and hospitals are located on the north side.

How dangerous is it for this many trains and many coal trains to be passing through a city such as Billings? We want an intelligent and informed discussion of this point.

Other points to consider:

General quality of life in downtown lowered -- no longer as friendly and inviting for pedestrians with additional air pollution, dust, grime, and noise.

- Lower property values.
- The presence of trains being a reason to shop elsewhere.

General social justice and quality of life problems arising from the community divided not only by tracks but by the real barrier of active trains.

Coal traffic would displace or slow agricultural shipping, and agriculture is a much larger part of our economy than is coal. This town needs to know, in our region needs to know what impact to expect on agriculture.

Just as the county line of Whatham County is not the end of the impacts that development of this Cherry Point Port will have, neither is the Washington state line the end of the impacts. Furthermore, the Army Corps of Engineers is a federal agency, not a state agency. It should be able to include any portion of the United States that is significantly impacted by this Cherry Point Port development. Billings, Montana will suffer virtually the same kinds of impacts as Spokane, Washington. I can't imagine that federal law allows for discrimination in the treatment cases of equals.

I respectfully request that the Environmental Impact Study for the Cherry Point Port expansion for coal include Montana as a whole and Billings in particular.

Thank you.

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